

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

OMB-01 /063 W

----- 114334

R 032112Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5218

INFO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 4897

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, DR

SUBJ: REFORMISTA PARTY PROPOSES BALAGUER FOR REELECTION IN 1978

1. MANUEL ESTRADA MEDINA, APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT BALAGUER ON OCTOBER 28, 1975 AS NEW SECRETARY GENERAL OF REFORMISTA PARTY, ANNOUNCED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY THAT THE PARTY WILL NOMINATE BALAGUER FOR REELECTION IN 1978. HE SAID HE WILL BEGIN IMMEDIATELY TO RESTRUCTURE THE PARTY AND TO REVITALIZE THE RELATED ORGANIZATIONS AND MASSES OF MEMBERS TO RESTORE IN THEM "THE ENERGETIC COMBATIVE SPIRIT WHICH HAS ALWAYS CHARACTERIZED US." ESTRADA WENT ON TO SAY THAT HIS RESTRUCTURING OF THE PARTY WOULD BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH EXPRESS ORDERS OF THE PRESIDENT AND FOLLOWING "HIS THOUGHTS AND DESIRES."

2. EVEN BEFORE ESTRADA'S ANNOUNCEMENT REFORMISTA HEADS HAD BEGUN TO ROLL. ON OCTOBER 24 DR PORFIRIO ROJAS NINA WAS SACKED AS SECRETARY OF STATE, THE GOVERNMENT POSITION HE PROBABLY OWED TO HIS PARTY POSITION OF FOURTH VICE PRESIDENT. THREE DAYS LATER, LIC ALVAREZ BOGAERT, FIRST VICE PRESIDENT OF THE PARTY AND CURRENTLY SECRETARY OF FINANCE FELL INTO DISGRACE IN A MATTER IMPUGNING HIS HONESTY WHILE HEAD OF THE STATE SUGAR COUNCIL (BEING REPORTED BY AIRGRAM). WITH APPARENT HIGH-LEVEL ACQUIESCENCE, ALVAREZ WAS PERMITTED TO BE SUMMONED BEFORE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. HIS POLITICAL FUTURE IS IN DOUBT. SEVERAL

OTHER REFORMISTA LEADERS ARE EXPECTED TO BE REMOVED OR DISCIPLINED SOON.

3. COMMENT: ALTMEUGH THE PRESIDENT'S CONCERN MAY BE FOR STRENGTHENING THE PARTY'S STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION, A COMMON DENOMINATOR AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE FELT HIS DISPLEASURE HAS BEEN THEIR LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR A FOURTH TERM. ALVAREZ HAD BEEN ACTIVELY COURTING SUPPORT FOR HIS OWN CANDIDACY, EITHER AS A REFORMISTA ALTERNATIVE TO BALAGUER, IF THE LATTER CHOSE NOT TO RUN, OR AS AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE. ROJAS NINA HAD BEEN INDISCREET IN EXPRESSING HIS VIEW THAT BALAGUER SHOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE IN 1978, AS HAD DEPUTY SANDINO GRULLON AND, THEY SAY, THE OUSTED PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL, DR REYNALDO MONTES DE OCA.

4. IT IS CERTAINLY TOO EARLY TO CONCLUDE THAT PRESIDENT BALAGUER WILL BE A CANDIDATE FOR REELECTION IN 1978. IT IS EVIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT ESTRADA'S ANNOUNCEMENT IS BEING TAKEN BY REFORMISTA AND THE OPPOSITION TO MEAN JUST THAT. AN EL CARIBE EDITORIAL APTLY POINT OUT, IN THE ISSUE OF OCT 31, THAT THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL HAD OPENED A "DANGEROUS PANDORA'S BOX" AND SUGGESTED THAT UNLESS THE PRESIDENT STOPPED THE "EXAGGERATED ENTHUSIASM" OF HIS FOLLOWERS, THE COUNTRY COULD FACE A LONG PERIOD OF STERILE PARTISANSHIP RATHER THAN GET ON WITH THE STUDY OF ITS GREAT SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROBLEMS. IN A TELEGRAM TO EL CARIBE, PRESIDENT BALAGUER SAID HE AGREED WITH THE EDITORIALIST, POINTING OUT THAT IN 1976 THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS STEMMING FROM THE RISE IN PETROLEUM PRICES MAY REQUIRE UNPOPULAR DECISIONS. HE SAID IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO CONVENE THE COUNTRY'S LEADING ELEMENTS AROUND A TABLE TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION.

5. DESPITE THE PRESIDENT'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE THOUGHTS AND CONCERNS OF EL CARIBE, ESTRADA'S ANNOUNCEMENT WILL CONTINUE TO BE INTERPRETED BY THE OPPOSITION AS CONFIRMATION OF THE CONTENTION THAT BALAGUER INTENDS TO BE REELECTED IN 1978 AND TO CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT FOR AS LONG AS HIS PHYSICAL CONDITION PERMITS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NOMINATION, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY LEADERS, PARTY EXPULSIONS, REORGANIZATIONS, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975SANTO04897
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750381-0858
From: SANTO DOMINGO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751180/aaaactuk.tel
Line Count: 99
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 SEP 2003 by RowellE0>; APPROVED <19 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REFORMISTA PARTY PROPOSES BALAGUER FOR REELECTION IN 1978
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, DR, PRD, (BALAGUER, JOAQUIN), (ESTRADA MEDINA, MANUEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006